



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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HOSTAGE TAKER FOUND GUILTY AT FEDERAL TRIAL

PHOENIX - Rufino Valdez-Lopez, 45, of Sinaloa, Mexico, was found guilty by a federal jury in Phoenix of Conspiracy to Take Hostages, Hostage Taking, Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens, Harboring Illegal Aliens, and Possessing and Using a Firearm during a crime of violence. The case was tried before U.S. District Court Judge Earl H. Carroll between October 2 - 9, 2007. The defendant will remain in custody pending sentencing which is set before Judge Carroll on January 7, 2008.

Valdez-Lopez and five other co-defendants worked for a criminal organization that held 76 illegal aliens hostage at a residence in Peoria, Ariz. in April 2007. Valdez-Lopez and the co-conspirators possessed and brandished an AK-47 type assault rifle to intimidate and control the aliens, gave the hostages very little food and detained them all in three small bedrooms. One victim testified that he was held hostage for nearly 40 days in the house. By the time he was rescued by law enforcement, the victim was physically and mentally weak from the lack of food and unsanitary living conditions.

U.S. Attorney Daniel G. Knauss stated that "Prosecuting these violent smugglers is a priority of the U.S. Attorney's Office, not only because of the violence against their hostages but also because of the potential for harm to the citizens living in the Arizona communities where they secure their drop houses."

"The drop house this criminal and his counterparts were operating was in a working class neighborhood with many families nearby," said Alonzo Pena, special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigations. "Using violence and intimidation, he helped keep more than 70 people imprisoned for weeks at a time to extort money. ICE is firmly committed to keeping these violent, armed smugglers out of our communities and away from our families. Hopefully this conviction and the sentence that will follow will send a message to these criminals that they are not welcome in Arizona."

Convictions for Hostage Taking and Firearm charges carry a maximum penalty of life in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both. These penalties must be served consecutively. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Carroll will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. Judge Carroll, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Peoria Police Department. The prosecution was handled by Raymond Woo and Lisa Jennis Settel, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

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